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Method

Study 1

- 186 foreign inmates were characterized in social demographic, criminal and legal aspects.

Study 2

- 42 foreign women in prison were interviewed. A qualitative Interview Protocol concerning the topics of life trajectories was used. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the software Nvivo9. So far, only 16 interviews were analyzed.

Sample

- 16 foreign women in Portuguese prisons.
- 8 from Europe; 4 from South America; 4 from African countries
 - 8 living in Portugal before imprisonment
 - 8 detained for international drug trafficking; 4 for domestic drug trafficking and 4 for other crimes

Introduction

This study aims at analyzing the narratives of foreign women detained in Portuguese prisons. It is part of a previous investigation (Matos, 2008) and is grounded on the recognition of Portugal as one of the European countries with the highest proportion of women among the prison population (despite the downward trend of recent years) and, secondly, on the increasing proportion of female foreign prisoners, much higher than the increase seen in the male prison population (Santos & Seabra, 2006; Hostettler & Achermann, 2008).

In this paper we present the results arising from the analysis of two specific narratives: a short story about the crime committed and another one about the experience of incarceration.

Results

CRIME

EXTERNAL ATTRIBUTION OF BLAME

1. I didn't do it

"I'm not going to be sentenced for the crimes of other people who are going around freely." (Helena, Slovenia, 35 years-old)*

2. I did it...but it wasn't my fault

"I was an easy pray in his life for him to reach his goal." (Julia, Brazil, 51 years-old)*

CRIME PAYS

1. For itself

"I had a great time; I was so confident, so happy." (Cristina, Spain, 30 years-old)*

2. For its profits

"Whenever I came back from my trips, I had so much money, such a lot of money." (Gloria, Spain, 52 years-old)*

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

"I won't stay here with my arms folded, I've got to do something because I can't find a job." (Irene, Brazil, 27 years-old)*

PRISON

POSITIVE VIEWS

1. The others (Prison guards)

"The prison guards are great, they try to treat us the best they possibly can." (Marianne, France, 39 years-old)*

2. My self

"Now I'm much more responsible, much more mature and stronger. " (Julia, Brazil, 51 years-old)*

NEGATIVE VIEWS

1. Bad conditions

"An inmate has to be dying" in order to get medical assistance. (Cristina, Spain, 30 years-old)*

2. Lack of Security

"Surviving in jail is hard." (Luisa, Spain, 31 years-old)*

3. Discrimination

3.1. Jurisprudence

"I think they should at least consider the possibility...the possibility to give us some probation." (Maria, Venezuela, 22 yers-old)*

3.2. Treatment by prison staff

"The way they call us and the way they call a Portuguese (...) they treat us differently! ." (Maria, Venezuela, 22 years-old)*

* Fictional names

Final considerations

- The discourse of most inmates about **crime** is based on unaccountability, and these women consider themselves as victims - of the criminal justice system, in the case of the ones who claim to be innocent – of others and of circumstances , in the case of the ones who admit they were involved in the crime.
- Nevertheless, narratives are also found concerning the crime's benefits - enjoyment and satisfaction associated to the act itself, and financial gains
- In the discourses about **imprisonment** experience, we find a positive appreciation of the prison system, in particular about the good practices of the staff members, and at a more personal level, the idea of such an experience as a turning point in their lives which has resulted in personal growth.
- Depreciations regarding conditions and resources and safety do not appear associated to being a foreigner. However, the inmates report discrimination in relationships amongst inmates and at the level of case law as well. Rather than nationality, discourses seem to emphasize a bias in law enforcement based upon the "non-resident" factor.

References

Hostettler, U., & Achermann, C. (2008). Cidadãos estrangeiros em duas prisões na Suíça. Vida prisional, reabilitação e destino pós-reclusão. In. M.I. Cunha (Org.), Aquém e além da prisão. Cruzamentos e perspectivas. Lisboa: 90º Editora; Matos, R. (2008). *Vidas raras de mulheres comuns*. Coimbra: Edições Almedina; Seabra, H. M. & Santos, T. (2006). *Reclusos estrangeiros em portugal - esteios de uma problematização*.Porto: ACIME - Alto Comissariado paroa a Imigração e Minorias Étnicas.